

FILLMORE, MILLARD

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CONTEMPORARIES

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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Millard Fillmore

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

YESTERDAY TODAY TOMORROW

Fillmore Lost Out.
Lincoln and Fillmore.
Buffalo Man's Blunder.
Political Letters.
Marked "Confidential."

By SAMUEL POTTER BURRILL

Somebody Told.
Joke on Lincoln.
New York Leader.
Our Two Presidents.
Consummate Politician.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN and Millard Fillmore were the two leading factors in national politics in the closing days of the slavery fight, North as in the South. It was prior to the Civil war. Both faced the political crisis in their own political careers in 1856, when the new Republican party was forming on North and South. Bells were rung the foundation of which the successful fight was made by Lincoln in 1860.

Fillmore, having served as President of the United States for almost three years, the last Whig President ever in office, had a strong claim for the Whig nomination in 1852. He had, unlike Tyler, stood faithfully by the party organization. He had followed the leadership of Clay and Webster in signing the final compromise measure that postponed for eight years the outbreak of the war between the North and South.

Fillmore Lost Honor

The Whigs had made two successful campaigns by running popular soldiers as candidates, William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor. Though there was a strong demand for the nomination of Fillmore in 1852, giving him one term as president in his own right, as was given Roosevelt and Coolidge, the leaders of the Whig organization yielded to the lure of another military candidate. Gen. Winfield Scott, head of the American army in the Mexican war, was nominated and most decisively beaten by Franklin Pierce, another Mexican war general.

Lincoln was beginning to come to the front as the leader of the Whigs in Illinois and his relations with Fillmore at this period were intimate. He favored the nomination of Fillmore instead of Scott in 1852. He thought Fillmore had given an administration about what Lincoln himself would have given if he had been President, as successor of President Taylor, having been elected on a Whig ticket.

Nothing prevented the nomination of Fillmore, arising from his record in the White House as Taylor's successor. It was simply the argument in favor of another military candidate, because the Whigs had elected their only two Presidents, Harrison and Taylor from the army.

One Blot on Record

The one blot in the record of Fillmore, registered in history, was his signature of the fugitive slave act that later became the most unpopular law ever enacted by congress in the slave controversy. As a matter of fact, the fugitive slave law was a part of a half dozen laws included by Clay and Webster in the omnibus act that made up the last great compromise plan. It was enacted by the votes of both Whigs and Democrats, sponsored by the Whigs. Fillmore, as a loyal Whig President, signed this law with the other compromise laws, all adopted at the same time.

The enactment of the last compromise measure sponsored by Fillmore was as popular in the Empire state as in the South. It was thought there would be no more agitation of the slavery issue; that the new peace would be restored between the two sections. Bells were rung in Buffalo and other New York state cities when the Clay compromise plan was adopted by congress and signed by Fillmore, as Whig President. Business interests in the Empire state had become tired of the constant agitation of the slave issue, to the exclusion of all other issues. Hence the rejoicing over the new compromise that was to end the controversy.



Fugitive Slave Law

The fugitive slave act was strengthened as a concession to the South. As a matter of fact, the law had been on the statute books for years but had never been strictly enforced in the North. Public sentiment was always against the return of fugitive slaves to the South. Northern men and women were organized to evade it. The issue was more controversial than practical.

Later there were riots in some of the leading cities over the officious activities of slave deputies to force the law on Northern communities. Because Fillmore happened to have been the Whig President in office, who signed the omnibus compromise measures, sponsored by Clay and the party leaders, he has been given a black eye in history. Clay, Webster and the congressional leaders who were active in forcing the legislation seem to have escaped the historic blight that fastened itself later on Fillmore.

As a matter of fact, Fillmore, like most Northern Whigs, was a free soiler. He opposed the extension of slavery in the Northern territories. He was active in his opposition to the slave Democracy that controlled the nation for eight years under Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan.

Fillmore and Lincoln

In these years, Fillmore and Lincoln were in close accord politically. Fillmore as an ex-President was far better known to the country than Lincoln. The latter had served only a single term in congress and did not break into the national limelight until his debate with Douglas over the Illinois senatorship in 1858.

The new Republican party, the outgrowth of the Whig party, allied with the Knownothings and all other anti-slavery opposition, was formed

in 1854. But the Whigs did not abandon their own party until two years later when the fight over the admission of Kansas as a slave state and the attack of Brooks on Senator Charles Sumner on the floor of Congress aroused the North and drove thousands of Whigs into the new Republican party.

Both Lincoln and Fillmore were cautious and conservative Whigs. They had been active Whig workers all their lives. They were excellent politicians, who kept in close touch with affairs. Neither rushed precipitously into the new Republican party. The decision had to be made in 1856. Then Lincoln came out as

the leader of the Republicans of Illinois. Fillmore chose to remain with the old Whig party that was strong in Buffalo and Western New York, accepting a nomination for President by the Knownothing or American party.

Buffalo Man's Blunder

Fillmore made the political blunder of his career in failing to follow Lincoln into the new Republican party in 1856. Fillmore made Buchanan's election sure by his division of the anti-slavery votes in every Northern state between himself and Fremont, the Republican nominee. Lincoln had not approved the nomination of Fremont. His preference was Supreme Court Justice McLean of Pennsylvania. Moreover, Lincoln was a conspicuous candidate himself for Vice-President in 1856, being beaten by Dayton, fortunately for himself.

There was a close and bitter fight in 1856 between Buchanan, the Democratic nominee; Fillmore, the Knownothing candidate and Fremont, the Republican candidate. Buchanan had the solid South, but he could not have carried the North if the strength of Fillmore had not deprived Fremont of thousands of anti-slavery votes in 1856. Lincoln as the Mid-West leader of the new Republican party devoted his entire time to bringing the Western Whigs into line for Fremont and to switch them away from Fillmore.

Buchanan won by a narrow margin, carrying the southern states, but only four northern states. Fillmore split the anti-slavery votes. Virtually he gave the election to Buchanan, carrying only a few electoral votes for himself. In Illinois, where Lincoln was in charge of the Republican campaign, Buchanan had 105,000 votes, Fremont 96,000 and Fillmore 37,000. There was every indication of the election of a Republican President in 1860, based on figures of 1856. The election would come by a consolidation of the anti-slavery votes of the North. Not a single electoral vote from any southern state would be needed in 1860 for a Republican victory.

Lincoln was greatly disappointed at the failure of the Republicans to

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carry Illinois. He devoted months of his time and used all the influence he possessed among the Illinois Whigs to bring them in line for Fremont. Not by speeches alone did Lincoln appeal to the unwilling Whigs. He pictured the Fillmore movement as a split between the Republicans and Knownothings.

Lincoln's Letters

Lincoln wrote hundreds of personal letters to Whig friends, striving to prove the race was between Fremont and Buchanan and that votes for Fillmore would help the Democratic candidate. Lincoln said



he knew the relative strength of the three parties in Illinois better than most men. He predicted that if Buchanan won, it would be due solely because the opposition was split between Fremont and Fillmore, whereas Bissell, the Republican candidate for governor, was sure of election because the Whigs and Republicans were united in support of him.

Lincoln wrote the most famous campaign circular ever issued in a national campaign, because of its utter frankness and because of the nation-wide influence it had. Though Lincoln was writing hundreds of personal letters to old-time Whigs, urging them to vote against Fillmore, there were hosts of Illinois Whigs who needed such personal attention. So Lincoln wrote a circular letter and put the word "confidential" at the top of it. This was carefully lithographed and sent to all leading Whigs. It was a new campaign device in those days. Nothing would be thought of the use of a lithographed letter in a modern presidential campaign.

"Confidential" Circular

But Lincoln's argument giving Whig votes in Illinois to Fillmore in place of Fremont had the merit of absolute frankness. "Every vote withheld from Fremont and given to Fillmore in Illinois actually lessens Fillmore's chance of being President," he argued. If Buchanan got all the slave states and carried any other single Northern state along with Pennsylvania, Buchanan would be beaten. The election would be thrown into the house of representatives and Fillmore might then be chosen. If, however, the Fillmore men should throw away on Fillmore enough votes in Illinois and Indiana to give those states to Buchanan (as actually did happen) that would more than compensate Buchanan for the loss of Maryland and Kentucky.

Lincoln argued in his usual Lincolnian way that this is "as plain as adding up the weight of the three small pigs." Since Fillmore has no chance in Illinois, the best thing for him was to let Fremont take it and thus keep it out of the hands of Buchanan.

"Let Buchanan have Illinois," he concluded, "and nothing can beat him. And he will get Illinois if men persist in throwing away votes on Fillmore."

Somebody Told

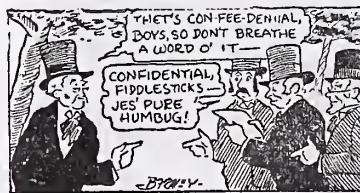
The Lincoln argument was politically sound, and later events demonstrated that he was an accurate prophet as well as a careful campaign manager. Illinois did give its electoral vote to Buchanan, making his election sure, just because the Whigs refused to follow Lincoln's advice and to support Fremont instead of Fillmore.

But the accident of politics upset all Lincoln's plans with his well-devised confidential circular. It was a political mischance that caused the ungodly Buchanan supporters to laugh at Lincoln. Laughter of this sort does no good to a campaign manager in a tight place.

At a rural Whig meeting in a grove, an old and loyal Whig called several of his party friends in private conference to consult regarding a matter that was puzzling him. He pledged them all to secrecy for the

letter he was to show them was marked "confidential." No one must know about it. All promised to keep silent.

With due solemnity, the old Whig farmer pulled from his pocket the confidential Lincoln campaign circular and handed it to one of the group to read. He began to read, then stopped, laughed and passed the letter on with like results. Soon all were chuckling and each took from his pocket an identical confidential letter from Lincoln.



Joke on Lincoln

The story leaked out. The joke was on Lincoln. The Buchanan newspapers charged that the apostle of righteousness and fair dealing had been caught in a cheap campaign trick, unworthy of a bad school boy. The joke did Lincoln no good. The jester was hoist by his own petard. It is doubtful, however, if it changed enough votes to turn the state to Buchanan.

Lincoln solidified his position as Illinois Republican leader in the campaign of 1856, putting himself in line two years later to win the party endorsement for senator against Douglas. Again he was unsuccessful, but he was making sure of his nomination for President in 1860, because he was solidifying himself as the midwest leader of the new party. Fillmore was far better known to the country in 1856 than Lincoln. He

might much wiser have refused the lure of the nomination of the American party in 1856, backed up by the hope of getting a majority of the old Whig votes. Either as an open candidate for the Republican nomination for President against Fremont, or as a loyal supporter of Fremont, Fillmore might have assured his leadership of the new party in New York state. He might have made an effective bid for the nomination in 1860 against Lincoln if he could have been assured of a solid New York state vote in the convention.

New York Leadership

William H. Seward lost his chance of nomination, when he thought his success was assured, because he was unable to solidify his own state. Fillmore had the prestige of the presidency. He was the leading lawyer of Buffalo, rated high among the lawyers of the country. All agreed he was a man of exceptional personality. He looked and acted the role of a statesman.

It was a mere matter of hard luck that Fillmore failed to win a nomination for President in his own name and right in 1852, being defeated for the honor by Gen. Scott. It was poor politics on his part that he failed to come out for the Republican party in 1856, as did Lincoln and most of the oldtime Whigs. He might thus have captured control of New York from Seward, just as Lincoln had harmonized Illinois Republicans under his leadership by devoting his time to building up the party in 1856, supporting the party nominee, Fremont, and opposing the campaign of his old party colleague, Millard Fillmore of Buffalo. If Fillmore had shown as good political judgment as did Lincoln, he might have contested with Lincoln for the nomination in the Republican convention in 1860. All that nominated Lincoln was the fact he had Illinois solid for himself. Seward faced the opposition of Horace Greeley, editor of the leading Republican newspaper in the United States, and the attacks of the Knownothings. Lincoln gave four years to the cultivation of harmony in the new party

ranks. Apparently no other aspirant had prepared himself for the convention contest.

If Fillmore had kept in line in 1856 he might have superseded Seward as New York's candidate in 1860. If Fillmore had gone to the Chicago convention with New York State behind him, he would have won the presidential nomination and Lincoln of Illinois would have been content with the nomination of Vice-President, which Seward had expected to give him.

Buffalo's Two Presidents

Buffalo has had two Presidents in the course of years. Certainly a record above the average for a city of its size and strategic geographical location. Both were men of ability. Both were good politicians. Fillmore held the limelight from 1848, when he was elected Vice-President with Taylor, until the presidential election of 1860, when he was for the last time the candidate of the dwindling Knownothing and Whig parties. Here was a period of a dozen years when with a little more luck or a little better political judgment, Fill-

more might have staged a comeback. Grover Cleveland became a national figure when he was elected Governor of New York State in 1882 and he continued in the spotlight until 1896, when he retired from the White House at the end of his second term, losing control of the Democratic party to Bryan.

Fillmore found in Lincoln his strongest political opponent. He might have come back if Lincoln had not so industriously and aggressively opposed him in 1856 because he was preventing a wholesale exodus of the Whigs into the ranks of the new Republican party in the mid-West.

A Consummate Politician

It is now revealed that Abraham Lincoln was the most consummate politician of any man of his day in the entire north. The Republican party owed much to his leadership, when its foundations were laid in 1856 against the candidacy of Millard Fillmore, who was overlooking his great opportunity for a comeback.

There have been scores of biographies of Lincoln written in recent years. But the most valuable to appear,—because the most understanding—is that by Albert J. Beveridge, ex-senator from Indiana, who died on the completion of the two volumes of Lincoln's life, ending with his nomination for president of the United States in 1860. Beveridge won his fame as biographer of John Marshall, chief justice of the United States. He expanded that reputation nationwide in his remarkable two-volume biography of Lincoln. He covers the period of the formation of the Republican party, when Lincoln captured the mid-West leadership.

Never before has the detail of Lincoln's masterful party leadership been disclosed so accurately as in this work of Beveridge. The Indiana senator knew the mid-West as Lincoln knew it. He was the most industrious and intelligent interpreter of the Lincoln period as party leader of all who have written. Reading these two volumes, I have been impressed as never before with the opportunity Millard Fillmore had and lost. Then it was Lincoln fought him because he insisted on making an independent canvass for the presidency in 1856, rather than fall in line with Lincoln and other old-time Whig leaders. They were urgently seeking to unite the new Republican party into a solid phalanx against slavery, as represented by Democratic presidents like Pierce and Buchanan.

What effect would it have had on American history if Millard Fillmore had grasped his chance in 1856 and captured the presidential nomination away from Lincoln in 1860, leaving Lincoln with only the consolation prize of a vice-presidential nomination, which was all the eastern leaders ever intended to give him?



Lincoln Lore

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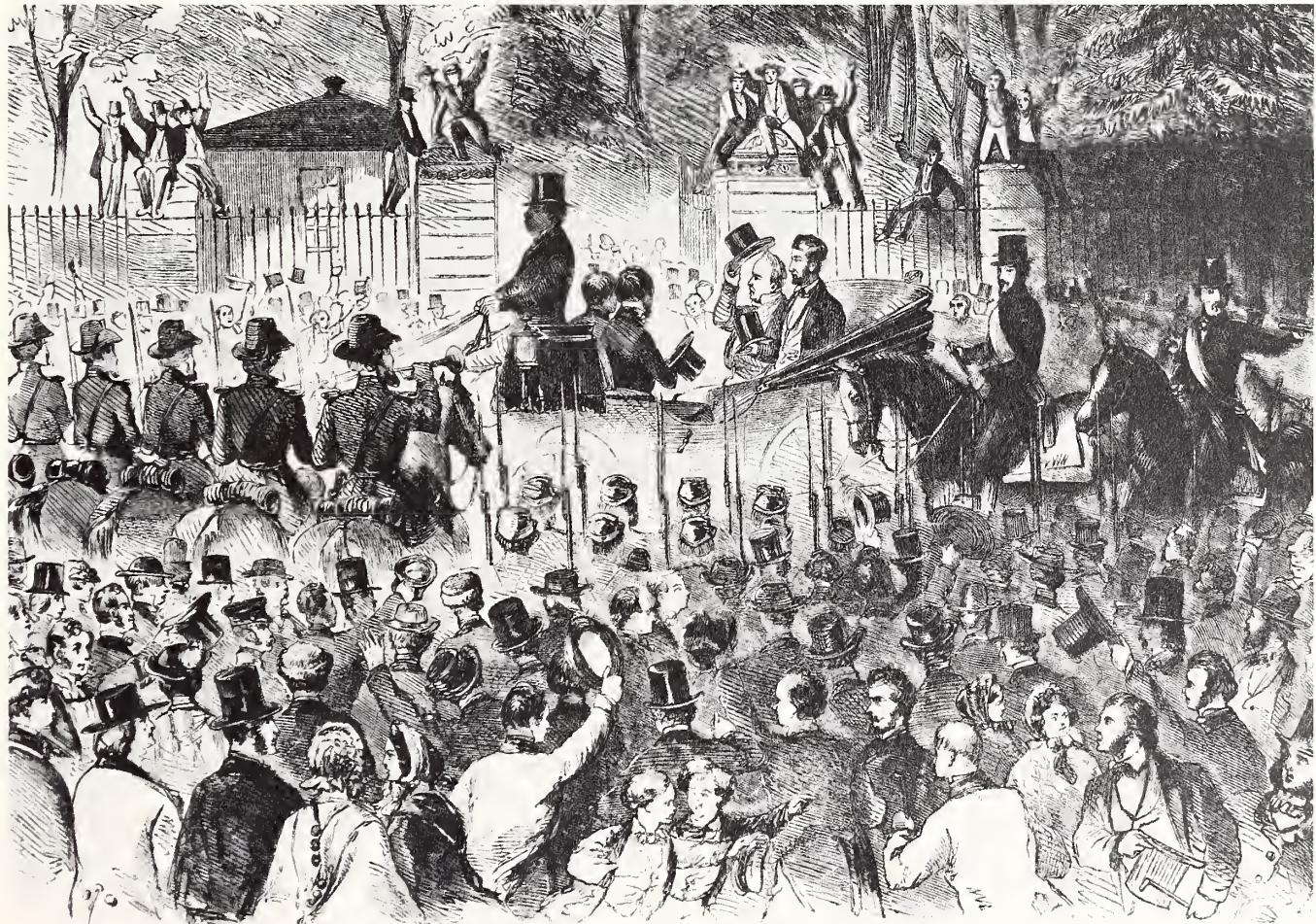
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FIVE EX-PRESIDENTS WATCHED THE LINCOLN ADMINISTRATION

Presidents who retire from office are expected to become "elder statesmen." Former President Richard M. Nixon seems currently to be bidding for that status by promising to speak occasionally "in non-political forums." He will stress foreign policy, he says, because partisanship is supposed to end at America's shores. He promises to be above the partisan battles of the day; he will become an elder statesman.

In Lincoln's day, Presidents who left office did not automatically assume the status of elder statesmen. The five surviving ex-Presidents in 1861 — Martin Van Buren, John Tyler,

Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan — did have enough reputation for being above the party battles for it to be suggested more than once that they meet to find remedies for the secession crisis. That such a meeting never took place is eloquent testimony to the weakness of the non-partisan ideal in the nineteenth century. The broad public did not regard these men — and the ex-Presidents did not regard each other — as passionless Nestors well on their way to becoming marble statues. They proved, in fact, to be fiercely partisan.



*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 1. Lincoln met two former Presidents shortly before his inauguration in 1861. Millard Fillmore greeted him in Buffalo, New York, and he met the incumbent, James Buchanan, twice in Washington. Reporters indicated that in both cases Lincoln chatted amiably, but no one knows the subjects of their conversations.

It was an irony that John Tyler came nearest to assuming an official status as a nonpartisan adjudicator in a conference meant to reconcile the sections, for he would later demonstrate the greatest partisan difference from the Lincoln administration of any of the former Presidents. By November of 1860, Tyler already thought it too late for a convocation of representatives of all the states to arrive at a compromise settlement which would save the Union. He did recommend a meeting of "border states" which would bear the brunt of any sectional war in the event a compromise was not reached. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri could at least arrange a peaceful separation of the South if they could not keep the Union together. Tyler's proposal never bore fruit, but, when the Virginia General Assembly proposed a peace conference of all states in Washington for February, 1861, Tyler became one of Virginia's five commissioners at the convention. The delegates in Washington elected Tyler president of the conference unanimously, but the convention was so divided in voting on recommendations that it was largely ignored by Congress. Tyler returned to Virginia and became an advocate of secession. When urged to lead a compromise movement after the fall of Fort Sumter in the spring, Tyler thought it hopeless. Lincoln, he said, "having weighed in the scales the value of a mere local Fort against the value of the Union itself" had brought on "the very collision he well knew would arise whenever Fort Sumter was attempted to be reinforced or provisioned." In November, Tyler was elected to serve in the Confederate House of Representatives. Far from becoming an elder statesman, John Tyler played a role in destroying the nation which had once elected him Vice-President.

Millard Fillmore despised Republicans as threats to the Union he loved and had once helped to preserve (by supporting the Compromise of 1850). In the secession crisis, he felt that the burden lay upon Republicans to give "some assurance . . . that they, . . . are ready and willing to . . . repeal all unconstitutional state laws; live up to the compromises of the Constitution, and . . . treat our Southern brethren as friends." Nevertheless, he disagreed with the cautious policy of lame-duck President James Buchanan, who felt that the government had no authority to "coerce a state." The men who passed ordinances of secession, Fillmore argued, should be "regarded as an unauthorized assembly of men conspiring to commit treason, and as such liable to be punished like any other unlawful assembly engaged in the same business."

Though no one knows how Fillmore voted in 1860, it is doubtful that he voted for Lincoln. It seemed awkward, there-

fore, when Fillmore was Lincoln's official host during his stay in Buffalo, New York, on the way to Washington for the inaugural ceremonies. Fillmore took him to the First Unitarian Church in the morning and at night to a meeting in behalf of Indians, but no one knows what they talked about.

When war broke out in April, Fillmore rallied quickly to the colors. Four days after the fall of Fort Sumter, the ex-President was speaking to a mass Union rally in Buffalo, saying that it was "no time now to inquire by whose fault or folly this state of things has been produced;" it was time for "every man to stand to his post, and . . . let posterity . . . find our skeleton and armor on the spot where duty required us to stand." He gave five hundred dollars for the support of families of volunteers and soon organized the Union Continentals, a company of men too old to fight. Enrolling Buffalo's older men of sub-

stance in the Union cause, the Continentals dressed in colorful uniforms, provided escorts for ceremonial and patriotic occasions, and provided leverage for procuring donations for the Union cause. Fearing British invasion through Canada to aid the Confederacy, Fillmore hounded the government to provide arms and men to protect the Niagara frontier.

Suddenly in February of 1864, Fillmore performed an abrupt about-face. In the opening address for the Great Central Fair of the Ladies Christian Commission in Buffalo, Fillmore rehearsed a catalogue of war-induced suffering and announced that "lasting peace" would come only when much was "forgiven, if not forgotten." When the war ended, the United States should restore the South "to all their rights under the Constitution." Republicans were outraged. The ex-President had turned a nonpartisan patriotic rally into a veiled criticism of the administration's conduct of the war.

Personally, Fillmore felt that the country was "on the verge of ruin." Without a change in the administration, he said, "we must soon end in national bankruptcy and military despotism." The ex-President, once a Whig and a Know-Nothing, endorsed Democrat George B. McClellan for the Presidency in 1864.

After Lincoln's assassination, Fillmore led the delegation which met the President's funeral train and escorted it to Buffalo. This did not expunge from Republican's memories Fillmore's partisan acts of 1864. Nor did it cool his dislike of Republicans. In 1869, he stated that it would be "a blessing to break the ranks of the corrupt proscription radical party, that now curses the country. Could moderate men of both parties unite in forming a new one . . . it would be well."

Among the five living ex-Presidents, none was more hostile to President Lincoln than Franklin Pierce. In 1860, he hoped



FIGURE 2. Millard Fillmore.

*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

that a united Democratic party would choose Southern candidate John C. Breckinridge. The New Hampshire Democrats endorsed Stephen A. Douglas instead, but Pierce went along with the decision, though without enthusiasm. Lincoln's election was, for this Democratic ex-President, a "distinct and unequivocal denial of the coequal rights" of the states. In a letter written on Christmas Eve, 1861, Pierce urged the South to delay action for six months. If the North did not right the wrongs done the South, then she could depart in peace.

It was hoped that all of the ex-Presidents might attend John Tyler's Washington Peace Conference. Pierce declined, saying that "the North have been the first wrong doers and [he had] never been able to see how a successful appeal could be made to the south without first placing [the North] right." After news of Fort Sumter's fall, however, he reconsidered and wrote ex-President Martin Van Buren, suggesting that Van Buren assemble the former Presidents in Philadelphia to resolve the crisis. He spoke in Concord, New Hampshire, urging the citizens "to stand together and uphold the flag." Van Buren declined to call the former Presidents together and suggested that Pierce himself should. The wind went out of the sails of the idea of an ex-Presidents' peace convention.

Soon, Pierce lost his enthusiasm for the war effort. He made a trip in the summer of 1861 to Michigan and Kentucky to visit old political friends. On Christmas Eve, he received a letter from Secretary of State William H. Seward, then in charge of the administration's political arrests, enclosing a letter from an anonymous source which accused Pierce of making his trip to promote membership in the Knights of the Golden Circle, "a secret league" whose object was "to overthrow the Government." Seward unceremoniously demanded an explanation from the former President of the United States. Pierce indignantly denied the charge, Seward quickly apologized, and it was soon discovered that Seward had fallen for a hoax. An opponent of the Republicans had written the letter to show how far the Republicans would go in their policy of crying "treason" at the slightest provocation.

Pierce sank into despair. He loathed the proscription of civil liberties in the North, detested emancipation, and saw the Lincoln administration as a despotic reign. The killing of white men for the sake of freeing black men was beyond his comprehension. He thought Lincoln a man of "limited ability and narrow intelligence" who was the mere tool of the abolitionists. He stopped short of endorsing the Southern cause. Old friends avoided him, but Pierce swore never to "justify, sustain, or in any way or to any extent uphold this cruel, heartless, aimless unnecessary war."

At a rally in Concord on July 4, 1863, Pierce courted martyrdom. "True it is," he said, "that I may be the next victim of unconstitutional, arbitrary, irresponsible power." He called efforts to maintain the Union by force of arms "futile" and said that only through "peaceful agencies" could it be saved. Pamphlets compared Pierce to Benedict Arnold, but he persisted and urged the Democratic party to adopt a platform in 1864 calling for restoring the Union by ceasing to fight. Republicans did not forget his actions. New Hampshire provided no public recognition of her son's public career for fifty years after the war.

Martin Van Buren, alone among the ex-Presidents, gave the Lincoln administration unwavering support. He refused Pierce's invitation to organize a meeting of ex-Presidents out of a desire not to be associated with James Buchanan, whose course during the secession crisis Van Buren despised. He had confidence in Lincoln, based probably on information he received from the Blair family, Montgomery Blair being a Republican and a member of Lincoln's cabinet.

There was no more interesting course pursued by an ex-President than James Buchanan's. He had more reason than any other to feel directly antagonistic to the Lincoln administration. Like Pierce, Buchanan had been accused by Lincoln in 1858 of conspiring with Stephen A. Douglas and Roger B. Taney to nationalize slavery in the United States. As Lincoln's immediate predecessor in the office, Buchanan had succeeded in his goal of avoiding war with the South until the new administration came in. The price of this success was the popular imputation of blame on the weak and vacillating course of the Buchanan administration for not nipping seces-

sion in the bud. It was commonly asserted that Buchanan conspired with secessionists to let the South out of the Union. Lincoln's Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin, for example, felt that the Buchanan administration "connives at acts of treason at the South." Despite the findings of a Congressional investigation, many persisted in the belief that the administration had allowed a disproportionate share of arms to flow to Southern arsenals and a dangerously large amount of money to remain in Southern mints. When war broke out, feelings were so strong against Buchanan that he required a guard from the local Masonic Lodge in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to protect his home, Wheatland, from vandalism and himself from personal injury. President Lincoln did not help Buchanan's plight when, in his message of July 4, 1861, he charged that he found the following upon entering office: a "disproportionate share, of the Federal muskets and rifles" in Southern armories, money in Southern mints, the "Navy . . . scattered in distant seas," and Fort Pickens incapable of reinforcement because of "some *quasi* armistice of the late administration."

Such charges rankled Buchanan, and he spent much of the war years in a careful but quiet attempt to amass documentation which would refute the charges. By late 1862, he had written a book which accomplished this task (to his satisfaction, at least), but he delayed publication until 1866 "to avoid the possible imputation . . . that any portion of it was intended to embarrass Mr. Lincoln's administration." Buchanan's friend Jeremiah Black had doubted that Buchanan could defend his own administration without attacking Lincoln's:

It is vain to think that the two administrations can be made consistent. The fire upon the Star of the West was as bad as the fire on Fort Sumter; and the taking of Fort Moultrie & Pinckney was worse than either. If this war is right and politic and wise and constitutional, I cannot but think you ought to have made it.

Despite the many reasons for which Buchanan might have opposed the Lincoln administration, the ex-President did not. As far as he was concerned, the seceding states "chose to commence civil war, & Mr. Lincoln had no alternative but to defend the country against dismemberment. I certainly should have done the same thing had they begun the war in my time, & this they well knew." Buchanan did not think the war unconstitutional, and he repeatedly told Democrats that it was futile to demand peace proposals. He also supported the draft.

Buchanan considered it too late in 1864 for the Democrats to argue that Lincoln had changed the war's aims. He was pleased to see that McClellan, the Democratic candidate, thought so too. Lincoln's victory in the election, which Buchanan equated with the dubious honor of winning an elephant, caused Buchanan to think that the President should give a "frank and manly offer to the Confederates that they might return to the Union just as they were before." The ex-President's political views were as clearly nostalgic and indifferent to emancipation as those of any Democrat, but he was not among those Democrats who criticized the war or the measures Lincoln used to fight it.

Buchanan spoke of Lincoln in complimentary language. He thought him "a man of honest heart & true manly feelings." Lincoln was "patriotic," and Buchanan deemed his assassination "a terrible misfortune." The two men had met twice when Lincoln came to Washington to assume the Presidency, and Buchanan recalled the meetings fondly, remembering Lincoln's "kindly and benevolent heart and . . . plain, sincere and frank manners." When the Lincoln funeral train passed through Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Buchanan watched it from his buggy.

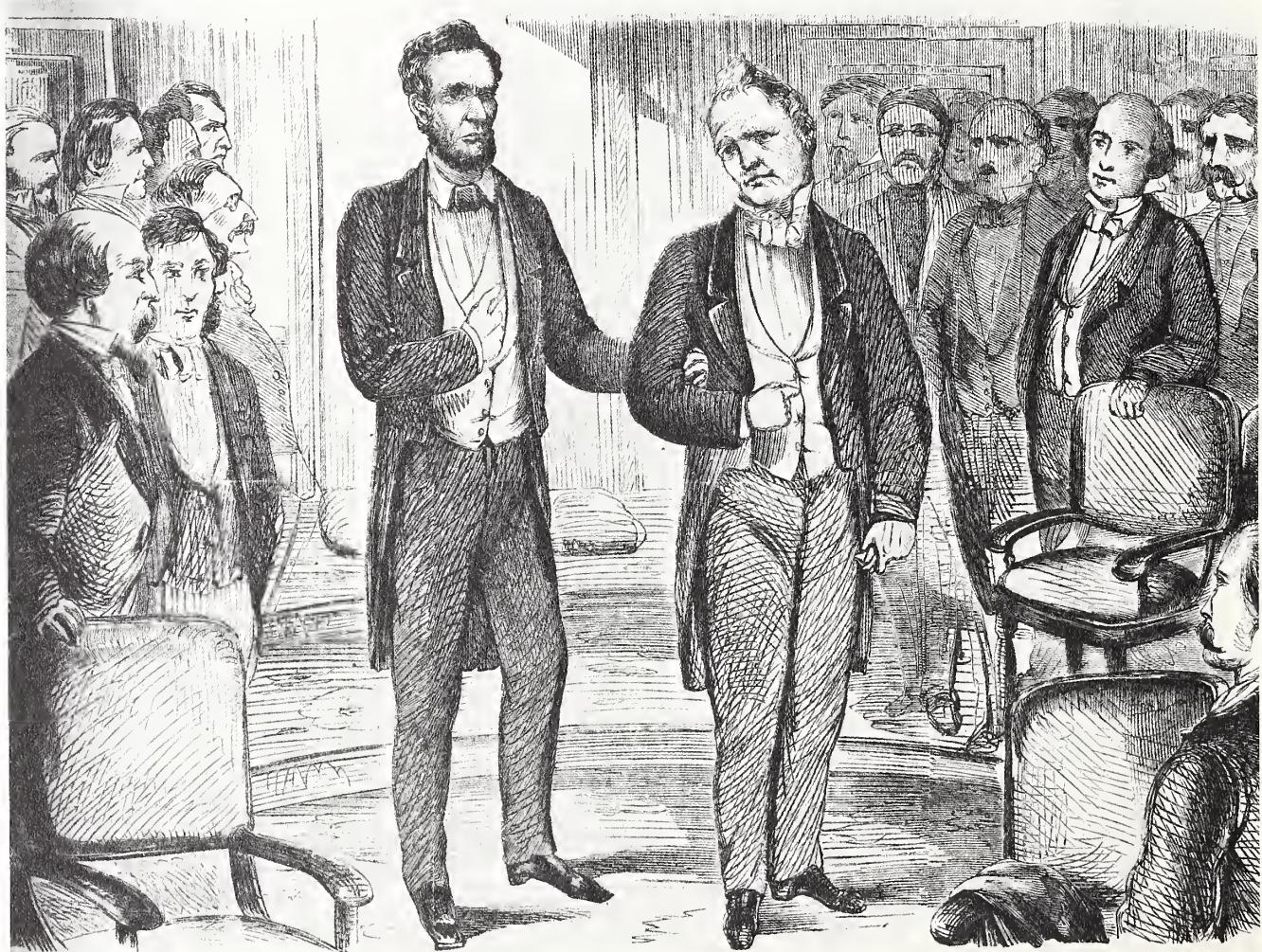
The ex-Presidents benefitted from the Revisionism of historians like James G. Randall. It was their work which rectified the generations-old charge that Buchanan trifled with treason. In some cases, however, this has been a distorting force. Randall's *Lincoln the President: Midstream* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1952) gives the reader an extremely sympathetic portrait of Franklin Pierce in keeping with Randall's view that most Democrats more truly represented Lincoln's views than his fellow Republicans. Thus Pierce appears as the victim of Seward's misguided zeal in the affair of the Knights of

the Golden Circle hoax and, in a particularly touching moment, as the friendly consoler of a bereaved father in the White House. In a horrible train accident immediately before entering the Presidency, Pierce and his wife had witnessed the death of their young son mangled in the wreckage of their car. Therefore, when Willie Lincoln died in 1862, ex-President Pierce sent a letter offering condolences. This is all one learns of Franklin Pierce in Randall's volumes on Lincoln's administration. It is useful to know of his partisan opposition to Lincoln and the war as well, and it in no way detracts from the magnanimity of his letter of condolence. If anything, it serves to highlight the personal depth of feeling Pierce must have felt for the Lincolns in their time of personal bereavement; it allows us even better to appreciate him as a man as well as a politician.

It is easy to forget that Presidents are men. This look at the ex-Presidents of Lincoln's day is a reminder that these men retained their personal and partisan views of the world. It would be hard to imagine an ex-President's club. Van Buren would have nothing to do with Buchanan, though both had been Democrats. Van Buren took the popular view that Buchanan was a "doughface" who truckled to the South instead of standing up to it as Andrew Jackson had done during the Nullification crisis. John Tyler remained a Virginian at heart and cast his fortunes with secession and against the country of which he had been President. Franklin Pierce and Millard Fillmore, the one a Democrat and the other a Whig in their prime,

retained a dislike of the Republican party. Fillmore supported the war with vigor but came to despair of the effort through suspicion that the Republican administration mishandled it. Pierce always blamed the war on Republican provocation and came quickly, and not without some provocation from the administration, to oppose the war effort bitterly. Ironically, James Buchanan, who labored under the heaviest burden of charges of Southern sympathies, was the least critical of the administration of any of the ex-Presidents except Martin Van Buren. Critical of Republican war aims like the rest, Buchanan, nevertheless, supported the war effort and maintained a high personal regard for his Presidential successor. Buchanan thus approached the twentieth-century ideal of an elder statesman.

Editor's Note: The Presidents of Lincoln's era have been rather well served by their biographers. Two splendid examples are Roy F. Nichols's *Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958) and Philip Shriner Klein's *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962). Robert J. Rayback's *Millard Fillmore: Biography of a President* (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1959) and Robert Seager, II's *And Tyler Too: A Biography of John & Julia Gardiner Tyler* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963) are useful. There is no careful study of Martin Van Buren's later life. The sketches of these Presidents here are based on these volumes.



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FIGURE 3. Lincoln and Buchanan did not meet again after this day.

